

Rifle Manipulation

Operating the Weapon's Safety

As experienced firearms instructors you should be aware that all weapon manipulation drills should begin with a solid foundation of safety skills. All loading, unloading, and malfunction clearance drills should be performed with the safety ON unless an un-cocked hammer prevents the selector from being turned to the “safe” position. Anytime one of these ARs is picked up, the handler should manipulate it with the strong hand on the pistol grip, trigger finger straight alongside the lower receiver, and the strong thumb should be resting on top of the horizontal selector lever (safety). Grabbing the pistol grip is easy as that is what it was designed for, but straightening the trigger finger to “index” is not natural and must be trained. The thumb of the firing hand should always be on top of the safety as this gives immediate tactile knowledge that the selector is on “safe” (lefties can use their thumb or trigger finger on the selector). Some instructors around the country refer to this shooting hand manipulation skill as the “**Tactical Index**”. From day one students should be mandated to handle these weapons in this fashion as this is the way they should be handled in the class room, on the range, and in the street. As an instructor you need to ensure that you not only model, but enforce this behavior.

Right Handed Shooters

For the right handed shooter using an M16, AR15, M4 Carbine type weapons system the task of switching off the safety is pretty ergonomic and self explanatory. The shooter uses their right thumb and switches the safety from SAFE to FIRE...And back to SAFE, when appropriate.

Weapon on SAFE



Thumb on top of safety



Safety pushed to FIRE, finger on the trigger

For the left handed shooter, an ambidextrous or reversed selector can be installed on personal or individually-issued ARs to allow selector manipulation in the normal fashion. If these are pool ARs with the standard selector then a different set of skills is required. The shooter can choose between using either the firing-hand thumb or trigger finger to manipulate the standard selector. Neither technique is as quick, efficient, or secure as an ambi/reversed selector, and the shooter's hand size and strength will usually be the deciding factor in choice. Either way, the student must endeavor to maintain contact with the horizontal selector lever while carrying this weapon.

Instructor's Note: You should be able to explain and demonstrate all basic firearms safety and manipulation skills both right handed and left handed for your students. We know as firearms instructors that we live in a "right handed world" and that following a failure on our part to provide specific instructions to left handed shooters, they are apt to just make stuff up for themselves, sometimes sacrificing accuracy, weapon retention, and/or safety.

Left Handed Shooter

The Thumb Method is probably the surest way to flip the selector down to the "fire" position, but leaving the thumb on the left side of the gun makes most other weapon manipulations more difficult. Returning the thumb to the right side of the rifle, after flipping the selector, isn't necessary when firing as it may slightly delay the first shot; but it does greatly enhance the strength of the strong hand grip and will be necessary for most other rifle manipulations.



Note: The shooter's thumb is not wrapped around the pistol grip which weakens the grip.

The Thumb Method continued



The thumb is returned to the full firing grip for enhanced accuracy and weapon retention.



The thumb returns to the safety to snap it up into SAFE mode when appropriate.

The Index Finger Method



Shooter begins with a full/firm firing grip

(Some will find that they can use the first knuckle of the trigger finger while other will need to loosen their grip to use their finger tip. Choose the one that allows you to snap the selector down 90 degrees every single time you try)



Shooter uses the knuckle of their left index finger to sweep down on the safety (see arrow)



Shooter returns index finger to trigger



To place the safety back to SAFE the shooter uses their “indexed” trigger finger to push up on the selector switch, engaging the safety.

OPERATING THE SAFETY ON THE RUGER MINI 14

The Ruger Mini 14 rifle is significantly different from the Colt AR-15 type rifles when it comes to operation of the safety. The safety is a metal “tab” that is pushed forward and backward to take the safety OFF and ON.



Safety is ON

When the shooter has made the decision to fire the trigger finger is placed into the trigger guard and pushes the safety forward in to the FIRE position.



Safety is OFF

When the shooter wishes to return the rifle to SAFE he/she uses the trigger finger (on the front of the safety) to push the safety back into the ON position.

LOADING (LEFT/RIGHT LOAD)

1. Point the muzzle in a safe direction. Make sure trigger finger is indexed.
2. Insert loaded magazine into the magazine well. **Take note that the top round in the magazine is on the RIGHT which will indicate that an even number of rounds are loaded** . Push up and pull down on the magazine to ensure it is securely seated.
3. Pull the charging handle or bolt handle to the rear and release, chambering a round.
4. Remove the magazine and inspect or feel that the top round in the magazine is now on the opposite side. This confirms that there is a round in the chamber. Reinsert the magazine – remembering to always use the **PUSH/PULL** method to insure the magazine is seated properly.



Insert magazine (note: top round is on left). Charge weapon to chamber a round. Remove magazine and observe or feel that the top round is on right. Reinsert magazine with Push/Pull motion.

UNLOADING

1. Ensure the weapon is on “safe.”
2. Point the muzzle in a safe direction. Make sure trigger finger is indexed
3. Press magazine release and remove magazine from the magazine well.
4. Pull the charging handle or bolt to the rear, and lock the bolt open.
5. Visually inspect the chamber through the ejection port and physically check the chamber through the magazine well to ensure the weapon is unloaded.
6. Close the bolt, close dust cover if applicable.

OPERATING THE CHARGING HANDLE

Ideally the shooter should attempt to operate the charging handle using the support hand. That allows the firing hand to maintain a full firing grip on the weapon. The thumb and index finger grasp the left wing of the charging handle, releasing the catch. The charging handle is pulled directly to the rear and released to travel forward on its own spring power.



However, as rifle instructors you may find that some of your students do not have the upper body strength hold the weapon steady with only the firing hand on the grip, and they may struggle with this technique. Those students should be encouraged to use the following technique:

Maintain a grip on the fore-end with the support hand. Use the index and middle fingers of the firing hand to reach up and “hook” the charging handle, releasing the charging handle catch. Pull straight back on the charging handle and then release the handle, letting it travel forward under its own spring power.



Remember: no matter what method one uses it is important that the charging handle is pulled completely to the rear and travels forward under its own spring power.

Instructor's Note: If you take nothing else from the article by Dr. Roberts (see Section 6), the paragraph below should be read, understood, and adhered to. Instructors, make this a part of your patrol rifle policy.

“When the same cartridge is repeatedly chambered in the AR15, the floating firing pin lightly taps the primer; with repeated taps, the primer compound gets crushed, resulting in inadequate ignition characteristics--despite what appears to be a normal firing pin impression. Once a round has been chambered, DO NOT RE-CHAMBER IT for duty use. Do NOT re-chamber it again, except for training. This is CRITICAL!!!”



Note: primer strikes

PRESS CHECK – Option One Support hand maintains a grip on the fore-end. Firing hand releases pistol grip, index and middle fingers hook the charging handle. Operator pulls back 1”-1 ½” inches on charging handle and visually inspects the chamber for a live round. The shooter then releases the bolt to slam forward under its own spring power.



PRESS CHECK – Option Two Maintain a firing grip; support hand pinches the charging handle (on AR type weapons) and pulls the bolt 1”-1 ½” inches to the rear; roll the weapon slightly to the left and visually inspect the chamber; release the bolt and allow it to slam forward. If still in doubt, run the bolt again, ejecting the cartridge and loading a new one.



SPEED RELOAD sometimes referred to as an Emergency Reload

The bolt locks back on empty magazine, or the magazine is nearly empty and the rifle absolutely needs to be reloaded right **NOW**. Index fresh magazine, eject the empty magazine to the ground, insert the new magazine using push/pull, release the bolt, assess.

- Is usually performed when the magazine is empty, and the bolt is locked open.
- The reload should occur with the butt of the rifle stabilized in the pocket of the shoulder or locked in the armpit, magazine well tilted toward the support side, up in your work space.
- Some magazines, such as with the Mini-14 and H&K, must be rocked forward and stripped from the gun.
- The trigger finger will be indexed before the bolt is release to chamber a fresh round.

Note: If a speed reload is done on a nearly empty weapon the bolt will not be locked to the rear.

SKILL STEPS: With the magazine empty and the bolt locked to the rear, or mostly empty:

1. Immediately grab the spare loaded magazine from its carry position.
2. Push the magazine release button (strip the magazine from the magazine well if the magazine does not immediately fall free from the magazine well.)
3. Push the loaded magazine firmly into the magazine well until it locks into place, and then pulling down on the magazine to ensure that the magazine **IS** locked into place.
4. The support hand then manually slaps the bolt catch or retracts the bolt handle, which allows the bolt to move forward into battery chambering the top round.
5. Evaluate threat/shoot if necessary.

*Speed Reload***TACTICAL RELOAD** (Retain partially spent magazine) **Lull in the fight.**

The purpose of the tactical reload is to load a full magazine into the rifle, if and when there is a break in the confrontation, and to save the replaced magazine on your person.

- This reload will be done from a position of cover, whenever possible.
- This reload will be done when you determine that there is time to complete the reload.
- This reload will be done with the butt of the rifle in the pocket of the shoulder or locked in the armpit, magazine well tilted toward the support side, up in your work space.
- With the trigger finger indexed.

Option 1 – Shooters with small hands often have difficulty holding two magazines in one hand. Therefore as a Patrol Rifle Instructor this should be the first option you should demonstrate.

After confirming the shooter has a spare magazine, release the partial magazine into the support hand, retain the partial magazine in a pocket or behind the belt, bring the new magazine up with the same motion and insert with a push/pull motion.

The PUSH/PULL technique needs to be a part of every tactical reload.



Out with the partial mag...



Stow it in a pocket...



Reload a fresh mag...

Option 2 – Retrieve a fresh magazine, holding it with the finger indexed along the leading edge. Move the new magazine between the index and fore finger (see photo). Release partial magazine into palm, while grasping it with the thumb and forefinger. Insert fresh magazine, push and pull to insure the magazine is seated, retain partial magazine (pocket or belt). This is done the same as the handgun tactical reload.

(The mag with the two tape stripes indicates the partial mag.)



Note: Grip is similar to tactical reload with handgun magazines.



Switch to a fresh mag...



Stow the partial mag...

Option 3 – Obtain a grip on the new magazine with all four fingers around front; bring to magazine well. “Slap” the new magazine against the magazine well, with the new magazine slightly higher, gripping both magazines. Release the old magazine, move the new magazine to the magazine well, insert with push/pull motion. Retain the partial magazine.



Both magazines gripped together. Out with the partial mag. In with the full mag.

MALFUNCTIONS

A malfunction with an patrol rifle can be defined as an interruption in its cycle of operation that can be cured by some type of immediate action drill. A correct malfunction clearance should always include the shooter moving to cover while correcting the problem. Correct malfunction clearances can be as simple as a transition to an auxiliary firearm. Most malfunctions are preventable through good maintenance, proper ammunition, good magazines, and proper technique (Remember the **PUSH/PULL** method of loading a magazine). Like the semi-auto pistol, there are three types of malfunctions that may occur with the patrol rifle.

Definition - A **malfunction** is a stoppage that can be rectified by an immediate action drill.

Primary

Fail to Fire - Empty chamber, dud round, out-of-battery

Indicator: Hammer fall with a click, but no “Bang”

Response: Basic Malfunction Clearance

Fail to Eject or “Stovepipe” - Casing in ejection port.

Indicator: Press trigger, no click, no bang, failure to fire

Response: Basic Malfunction Clearance

Secondary

Feed-way Stoppage or “Double Feed”

Indicator: Press trigger, no click, no bang, failure to fire; double feed.

Response: Secondary Malfunction Clearance

But unlike the duty pistol, patrol rifles feed from both sides of their double-staggered magazine and not from a single cartridge set of magazine feed lips such as those on a pistol’s staggered magazine. This means that a patrol rifle can experience secondary malfunction caused by a true “double-feed”, i.e. two live rounds trying to fit into the chamber at the same time, while an semi-auto pistol’s secondary malfunction is usually caused by a live round together with a fired cartridge case that was not extracted properly. This true “double-feed” malfunction in the rifle can be made worse if the rifle operator immediately performs a Primary Malfunction Clearance which will only pound the two live cartridges more tightly together. For this reason, patrol rifle shooters should learn that their first step, before they start any malfunction clearance, should be a **quick visual check of the ejection port** to ascertain the type of malfunction. **In any situation where the weapon malfunctions the operator should quickly glance at the ejection port/bolt assembly area to confirm the type of malfunction clearance necessary.**



A brief inspection

TEACHING MALFUNCTIONS AND CLEARANCES

PRIMARY MALFUNCTION - Misfire; Fail to Fire - Failure to Eject; Stovepipe

Identification: The malfunction is identified by the shooter hearing a “click” when the trigger is pressed and the hammer falls (for a fail to fire) **OR** the malfunction is identified by the trigger being “mushy” and a spent casing protruding partially from the ejection port (for a failure to eject). For either situation the clearance is the same.

Primary Malfunction Clearance:

1. **“Push-Pull”** - This is the equivalent of the “Tap” step in the basic malfunction clearance for auto-pistols. Because of the type of magazine and catch for the assault rifle, a simple “tap” would not be adequate to ensure the magazine is fully seated in the magazine well. Consequently, the “tap” or push must be followed by a slight pull. Performed by using the support hand while maintaining a firing grip with the strong hand, butt stock in the shoulder pocket and, eyes focused on the threat area.



The weapon fails to fire – “CLICK”



Push up firmly on mag



Pull down on mag

2. **“Rack and Roll”**- The charging handle or bolt handle is run aggressively and completely to the rear and allowed to snap forward with its own energy. This step clears the chamber and chambers a fresh round. The rack step is performed using the support hand while maintaining a firing grip with the strong hand and “rolling” the weapon over to the right 90 degrees so that the ejection port is perpendicular to the ground.



Rack and Roll



Charging handle all the way to the rear



Charging handle is released to travel forward under the spring's power

PRIMARY MALFUNCTION CLEARANCE (continued)

3. **“Assess”**- Finish the drill by assessing the threat area, including firing the weapon if the threat dictates the necessity.



Head and eyes remain UP, watching threat

Failure to Eject; Stovepipe

Identification: The malfunction is identified by the trigger being “mushy” and a spent casing protruding partially from the ejection port.



Note: Spent casing protruding



A quick look to confirm the nature of the malfunction

The same Primary Malfunction Clearance will rectify both types of malfunctions.

As firearms instructors you will note that the malfunction clearances for rifles are based on the same principles as those used with semi-auto handguns. This was done specifically to maximize the commonality of training for your students when you return to your agencies.

SECONDARY MALFUNCTION CLEARANCE

Double Feed; Feed-way Malfunction; Buried Stovepipe

Identification: The malfunction is identified by the trigger being “mushy.” A quick look confirms to the shooter that the malfunction is a double feed type. This step is performed by the shooter “rolling” the weapon to the left just far enough to look into the ejection port while keeping the butt stock against the shoulder.

1. Look and Take Cover



Operator identifies the problem



Note: A true double feed

SECONDARY MALFUNCTION CLEARANCE

2. Lock the bolt to the rear



Eyes on threat, left thumb on bolt catch, charging handle to the rear. ^ Left side view ^

Right-handed shooters - Using the support hand, the shooter supports the weapon by cradling it immediately in front of the magazine well while pressing the butt stock into the shoulder and using the support hand thumb to depress the bolt catch. With the strong hand the shooter grips the charging handle or bolt handle with the forefinger and middle finger in a hooking fashion and pulls the charging handle to the rear.

Left-handed shooters - Option 1: Using the trigger finger or thumb, the shooter depresses the bolt catch. The charging handle or bolt handle is pulled to the rear using the support hand in the same hooking fashion as described for right-handed shooters. Option 2: This is the same as the method described for right-handed shooters, with the exception that the bolt catch is depressed using the middle finger of the support hand.

Instructor's Note:

1. Make sure that your officers understand that if they are in close immediate danger when a Secondary Malfunction occurs , they should quickly transition to their handgun and finish the fight. If they have cover and distance then they should take the time to clear the rifle as it will always be the better weapon to fight with.

2. Some shooters/students may find it difficult to operate the charging handle with the support hand. Instructors should be prepared to demonstrate pulling back on the charging handle with either hand.

SEE: Operating the charging handle earlier in this section.

3. Pull/Drop Magazine Free and Discard



Aggressively strip out magazine

Right-handed shooters - The shooter depresses the magazine release button and aggressively strips the magazine from the magazine well with the support hand and lets it fall to the ground. (Retain if no spare magazine is available.) Keep the magazine well directed towards the ground so that gravity will assist in getting the debris to fall out of the biggest opening in the rifle.

Left-handed shooters - Using the support hand, the shooter grips the magazine while simultaneously depressing the magazine release button with the support hand thumb and aggressively strips the magazine from the magazine well and lets it fall to the ground. (Retain if no spare magazine is available.)

4. Bladed Fingers Clear Through Magazine Well

On some systems, notably the AR-15 types, the casings may fail to fall down though the mag well as they are still jammed together. The shooter uses the support hand, push the fingers straight up into the magazine well, sweeping the cartridge cases to the rear in an attempt to work them free. This should dislodge the jammed cases.

Instructor Note: The following pictures show two options for clearing the magazine well. Option 1 works better for shooters with larger hands. Option 2 would be a better choice for operators with smaller hands. In either case, ensure that your officers understand that if they violently sweep their fingers rearward and strike the bolt face, that rearward pressure may release the bolt catch, allowing the bolt carrier group to snap forward to injure their fingers!

Option 1

Retain the partial magazine in your hand while you insert your fingers up through the mag well.

Option 2

Stow the used mag in a pocket



Clear the weapon with your fingers

5. Rack Bolt 3 Times

The charging handle is run aggressively through full cycle 3 times and allowed to fall forward with its own energy. This step clears the chamber and ejection port. The rack step is performed using either the support hand while maintaining a firing grip with the strong hand, or the strong hand as pictured above. The butt stock is held against the shoulder and eyes are focused on the threat area.



Rack the bolt 3 times Remember: the bolt should spring forward under its own energy

6. Push/Pull a Fresh Magazine

Maintaining a firing grip with the strong hand and using the support hand, the shooter extracts a fresh magazine from its carrier, being sure to grip the magazine properly with the index finger touching the tip of the top round. The shooter then inserts the magazine into the magazine well and briskly seats it with a push/pull to ensure the magazine is fully seated. This is performed keeping the butt stock in the shoulder pocket/armpit and eyes focused on the threat area.



Load a fresh magazine

7. Rack

The charging or bolt handle is run aggressively and completely to the rear and allowed to fall forward with its own energy. This step chambers a fresh round. The rack step is performed using the support hand while maintaining a firing grip with the strong hand, or as pictured below using the firing hand. The butt stock is held against the shoulder and eyes are focused on the threat area.



Head and eyes UP, rack the charging handle

8. Assess

Finish the drill by assessing the threat area, including firing the weapon if the threat dictates the necessity.



Assess the threat

The value of this malfunction clearance drill lies in its ability clear all types of malfunctions. If the shooter is in a situation that does not allow him/her to see the weapon, a secondary malfunction clearance drill will usually get the rifle back into the fight.

It is important for shooters to remember that a simple Transition Drill to another available weapon, such as the pistol, is also an acceptable malfunction clearance depending on the range, circumstances, and weapon. However, the shooter has selected the rifle as the most appropriate weapon for the mission; **every effort should be made to get the rifle operational if conditions permit.**



A skilled operator could clear this malfunction in a matter of seconds



Even this problem could be solved quickly with the proper malfunction clearance drill



OK! Now it's time to transition to your handgun.

TRANSITION DRILLS

In the event the rifle malfunctions or is out of ammunition (and no more magazines), transition from the rifle to the handgun might be necessary. It is important for the student to develop a habit of transition in the event of such an occurrence. Studies have indicated that the transition takes less time than clearing a malfunction. The transition is only necessary for close quarter combat. **If the shooter is behind cover and/or a long distance away, consider clearing the malfunction or acquiring more ammunition.**

I. Standard Sling

- A. With your support hand on the fore-end, lower the muzzle down, touching the back of the support hand to the support side waist or thigh. This should leave the muzzle pointing down and slightly outside of the support side foot. Another option is to clutch the fore-end up to the upper support side chest, back of the fingertips touching the chest. This should leave the muzzle straight up, off of the support side of the head.
- B. Shift your strong side leg forward as you draw your handgun.
- C. Assume a proper one-handed shooting stance.
- D. Evaluate, and fire your handgun if necessary.

Option 1



Muzzle swings down and away



Shooter draws handgun

Option 1 continued



Shooter presses handgun out to full extension



Rifle stance- strong leg slightly back



One-handed handgun stance- strong leg forward

Option 2



Muzzle swings up



Rifle held firmly to chest – handgun extended



Note: Support leg forward with rifle (See Arrows) Strong leg forward with one-handed pistol

II. Tactical Carry Sling

- A. Let go of the rifle with your strong hand, pulling the muzzle down with your off hand.
- B. Draw your handgun with your strong hand and assume normal two-handed firing grip.
- C. Evaluate and fire if necessary.



Transiting to Handgun